Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 4 April 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 20th April 2015: Nehru Zoological Park. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Established in October 1959 and opened to the public in October 1963, the 380-acre Zoo, located adjacent to the Mir Alam Tank, offers its denizens a variety of habitats, including patches of forest, a water body, grassland, etc. Not surprisingly, the zoo has usually yielded a good selection of bird sightings. The various enclosures hold a lot of small ground and tree birds, as well as a number of water birds. Eurasian Thick-knees have been known to breed near the Sambhar enclosure. There have been several interesting sightings and observations in the past, and this trip should be no exception. There is also the added attraction of the Butterfly Park within the zoo.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Nikil Rangadas on "Gorillas in the Mist".
Tuesday, 7th April 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Nikil is a Life Member of our Society and is an avid traveler. His wanderlust has taken him to the heart of Africa where he encountered and studied the gorillas from up close. He will share his experiences with these fascinating animals which are now highly endangered.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD KIN

Report – Pulicat, 25-28 December, 2014

Text: Amritha Lawrence; Photos: Umesh Mani

Eurasian Spoonbill

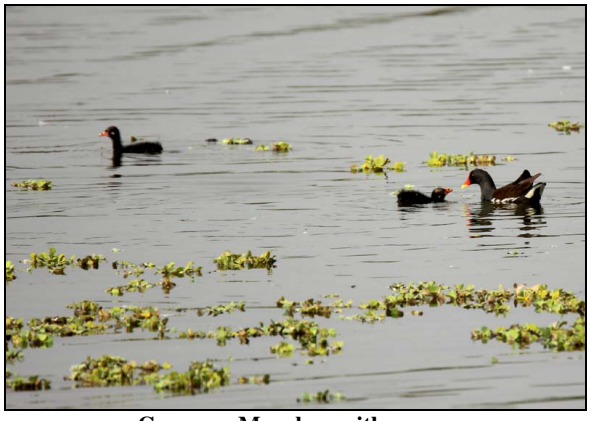
So said William Shakespeare. Indeed, the touch of nature can make even the most iced heart thaw and dance with joy for the chance to stand amidst something so peaceful and soothing to your heart and soul. This is what my heart felt during my recent trip to Pulicat for the year-end Annual Waterfowl Census, with my father Lawrence Mathappan, Humayun Taher and Mr. Ramakrishna Rao. As everyone else was in the rush of heading back home for the Christmas holiday, we were heading to the station to mark the beginning of what would turn into the best way of closing one's year.

It was around 4:30PM on 24th December when we reached Secunderabad station. The train that was supposed to arrive at 5:20PM came at about 5:45PM as per our Indian Standard Time, but left the station soon to try and make up for the lost time. We found our seats and, once we had settled in, the older crowd started sharing their prior experiences with this particular event. By around 10:00PM, most of us called it a night, but with all the jitters and excitement we had, most of us woke up earlier than the estimated reaching time. Reaching Sulurupeta at around 3:30AM, we took an auto to the lodge, where we met up with our other group member, Umesh, and then retired to our rooms to grab a little sleep before our day actually started.

Day 1 - December 25, 2014 - Nelapattu

Common Hawk Cuckoo

Getting ready by 6:30AM for what would be a long but great day, we all met up in front of the lodge. After a good breakfast, and having packed ourselves some lunch, we set off on our way to Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary to start our Bird census. Sitting in the 'boot' of the seven-seater auto, I had an excellent view of both sides of the road, and saw an Asian Openbill and a Purple Heron in flight. Reaching the Sanctuary at about 9:00AM, we were greeted by a Common Hawk Cuckoo sitting on the fence beside the entry path, emitting its eerie call, and a few Ashy Woodswallows on the electric wires in the adjoining field. Entering the Sanctuary, we started walking towards the watch-tower.



Common Moorhen with young

In and beside the water on the left, we spotted a Common Moorhen with young ones in tow, a White-breasted Waterhen and some Egrets before we came to the first clump of bushes, on which rested a bunch of Cormorants and a few of the stunning Eurasian Spoonbills in full breeding plumage. Meanwhile, we met up with Mr Ramakrishna Rao, who had come there directly. Walking along the trail, we stopped at our first viewing point to watch the first set of waterfowl, and it was like heaven on water to me - never in my wildest dreams had I ever thought that I would ever be so close to the birds I always saw only on TV!

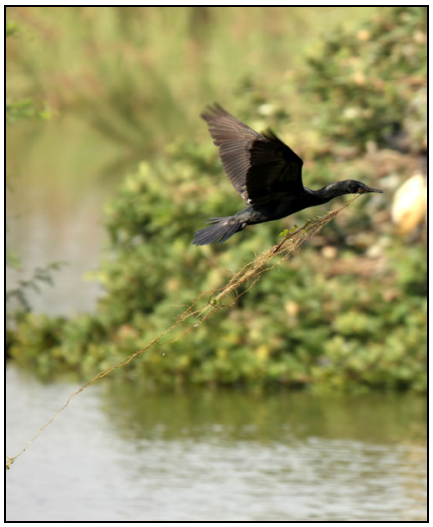
As we moved further along the trail, what I at first thought to be a few Spot-billed Pelicans and Asian Openbills turned out to be a whole blanket of them covering most of the place. Having spent a little time there, we decided to take a look further down the trail in the hope of finding some other species, but we did not find anything extraordinary, barring a Pied Kingfisher and a few Blue-tailed Bee-eaters which entertained us for a while. Returning to the watch-tower, we set up our scope and started the count. It was fun when the 'tourists' strolling around also got interested in what we were doing and started looking at the birds through our binoculars and spotting scopes.

Spot-billed Pelican with chick in nest

The only disappointment was that the nesting seemed to have been delayed - we found only one Spot-billed Pelican chick that was hatched, the rest of the Pelicans seemed to be still building their nests or, in some cases, incubating. But it was good to see about 9-10 Asian Openbill nests with some few-days-old chicks.

Asian Openbill with chicks in nest

Another highlight for me was the sight of two Black-crowned Night Herons hiding in between the branches and peeping out at us. There were also a lot of Black-headed Ibises and Cormorants, some of them engaged in nest-building, and assorted Egrets.



Little Cormorant with nesting material

Black-headed Ibis

A Eurasian Marsh Harrier made a brief overpass.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier

Winding up the count by around 12:00PM, we parted ways with Mr. Ramakrishna Rao and set off to a nearby café to have some refreshments, where I spotted a Large-billed Crow chasing a Common Kestrel. After the short break, we went back to the grassland adjoining a lake, opposite the sanctuary, hoping that we may find some interesting birds there. We did find some Little Stints and Plovers but I was too tired and did not have the energy to accompany the others as they walked around the area. As I was sitting at the auto, I spotted a few Prinias, which flew before I could get a picture of them. On their return, the others reported having seen a Montagu's Harrier, besides various other waders.

Montagu's Harrier

Soon after, having returned to the lodge and freshened up, the others gathered to discuss and complete the list of birds seen during the day, while I, being quite exhausted, called it a day and went to sleep.

Day 2 - December 26, 2014 - Tada & Irakam Island

The day began with the arrival of another group member, Anand Kalinadhabhatla, who reached the lodge around 5:00AM. After the usual breakfast, and having collected our packed lunches, we set off for a day of birding at Tada & Irakam Island in Pulicat Lake. Near the jetty, we were welcomed by a beautiful Caspian Tern, some Scaly-breasted Munias, Jungle Babblers, and a couple of Blyth's Pipits.

Blyth's Pipit

Eurasian Curlew

We saw a Eurasian Curlew, which was like a flag-off to the great day that awaited us. Once the boat was ready, we set out for birding in and around the island. En route, we saw a few jellyfish in the water; this was the very first time I had come across them, so it gave me such a jittery feeling that I almost flipped the boat in order to see them. Behind the boat, I saw two Caspian Terns following our trail in the hope of finding something to eat. We also spotted a few flying fishes here and there.

After a fairly long boat ride, we arrived at Irakam Island. Initially we did not see many birds, but as we scanned the surrounding areas, we started seeing them, camouflaged as they were amongst the grass - Grey-headed Lapwings, Pacific Golden Plovers, Little and Great Cormorants, and lots of terns flying around.

Grey-headed Lapwing

After unsuccessfully trying to photograph some of the terns, we started walking into the island to see what treasures lay hidden there. It turned out to be a long walk in the heat of the day, but we were rewarded by sightings of a Pied Crested Cuckoo, some more Pacific Golden Plovers at close range, a few unidentified Snipes that shot off like bullets as we walked by, a distant Eurasian Curlew and a couple of Painted Storks.

Pied Crested Cuckoo

By now it was getting really hot, so we decided to begin the long walk back. En route, we saw various assorted larks and pipits, of which the Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark gave good views.

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (male)

Once we had almost reached the jetty where our boat was berthed, we sat down on a bund to take a tea break and also discuss what we saw on the island. Umesh and I tried to get a good shot of the Little Tern, which was flying just a few feet away from us, but it kept taking sudden turns just as we would click the camera. Soon after, we set off again on the boat, planning to scout the lake en route to find other birds; once again, we were accompanied by our very old friend the Caspian Tern. Lunch on the boat turned out to be an interesting picnic, since we had no plates - which is when I realized my talent to really work with gravity on sea!

Caspian Tern

En route, we came across a few Greater Flamingos, Spot-billed Pelicans and Northern Pintails and, a little further, a flock of Gulls, which were predominantly Brown-headed - the first time I ever saw them in front of me - and a few Pallas'. They seemed tolerant, so we could take a few good shots of them sitting in the water.

Pallas's Gull

We now decided to head back to the mainland. On reaching shore, we spent a little time at the water body near the Forest Department office, where we found some Common Coots, Northern Shovelers, and our old friends the terns. Since it was already getting dark, we set off for our lodge, deciding to return here again the next day.

As usual, we freshened up in our rooms, by which time Mr. Ramakrishna also arrived at our lodge. We started listing out the birds we saw that day, ensuring that nothing was missed out, and soon after, went out for dinner. Walking back later, we decided that the day was not yet over - some coffee and ice cream was needed! A nearby general store supplied us with all that we wanted, after which we bid each other good night and retired for the day.

Day 3 - 27 December 2014 - SHAR Road

Today's plan was to scout the Sriharikota Road. By 6:30AM the crew was all ready, along with lunches packed, and raring to go. Reaching the location, we started the walk and the first burst of excitement hit us immediately - a Pallid Harrier! For some time, we watched the harrier lazily scanning a nearby field; unfortunately it was too far away to take decent photographs.

Pheasant-tailed Jacana

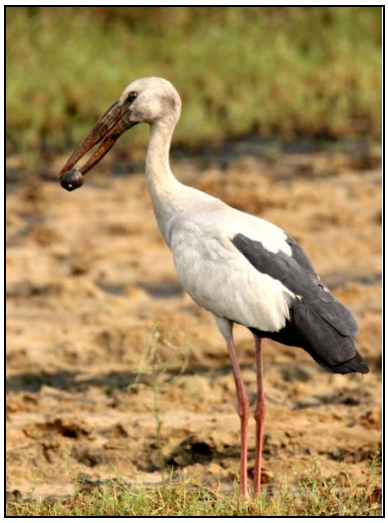
Moving on, we were treated to the sightings of several Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, adult and immature Little Ringed Plovers, Purple Swamphens, Common and Wood Sandpipers, a few Northern Shovelers, Asian Openbills and Painted Storks.

Painted Stork

Little Ringed Plover (adult)

Little Ringed Plover (juvenile)

Several Barn Swallows perched on the wires, sunning themselves. A couple of Blyth's Pipits challenged us for a while, and an Asian Openbill showed us why its bill is designed the way it is.



Asian Openbill

Next came a bush which gave us the sighting of a handful of chattering Rosy Starlings, followed by a patch of mud-flats that was teeming with waders. And this is where we hit pay dirt - Humayun's sharp eyes located, in the midst of scores of waders, the Common Ringed Plover! Apparently this was a very infrequently seen bird, and with his patient explanations, we were all able to see and appreciate this prized sighting.

Common Ringed Plover (adult)

Common Ringed Plover (juvenile)

After spending some good time with this Plover, we decided to move ahead. After a long walk, we came across a fairly large number of flamingos, but the only disappointment was that they were not in one single group, but rather, were scattered intermittently along either side of the road. We also saw good numbers of Kentish Plovers, Common Greenshanks, Ruff, Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, and Little Stints with, in their midst, a solitary Sand Plover.

Kentish Plover (adult)

The temperature was getting chilly, and suddenly came a misty fog which made it difficult for us to take pictures and identify the birds. After waiting a while, we decided to proceed further on our way towards Sriharikota.

It was an eventful ride as we spotted big flocks of Little Stints flying around in perfect coordination with each other. We also saw a Common Kestrel with its kill, which was a sight to behold. Out in the distance, we saw a big flock of Godwits and a huge raft of what looked like Northern Pintails - it was as though a carpet had been spread on the water. Umesh later told us that it took him eighteen photographs to cover the entire lot from left to right!

Possible Northern Pintail flock

Common Kestrel with kill
(Photo: Humayun Taher)

On the other side, we were entertained for a time by a shining Pacific Golden Plover. There were also quite a few Brown-headed Gulls flying around. Further afield, there were a few Glossy Ibises sauntering around in the wet patches of grass.

Pacific Golden Plover

Brown-headed Gull

We then stopped for a leisurely lunch near the gates of SHAR station, where we rested for a while, watching a few crows at work extricating food from the garbage bags. Around 2:30PM, we decided to head to the lake near the Forest Department office, hoping to find some more interesting birds, since the previous day did show promise. Once there, we saw a lot of Whiskered and Little Terns, along with several Northern Shovelers and Common Coots. Winding up by 4:30PM, we headed back to the lodge for the evening routine of comparing our lists and observations.

Day 4 - 28th December 2014 - Minjur

This was the last day of the trip, but since our train was scheduled to leave only at 7:00PM, we decided that we could go out birding till around lunch. So, as usual, we set off early, finished breakfast and headed to a couple of interestingly-named nearby lakes, Peddanna Cheuvu and Chinnanna Cheruvu, hoping to find something 'different'.

River, Whiskered and Little Terns

To our surprise, we did manage to find one Black Bittern and, to add a twist, a River Tern - which was a surprise because River Terns being fresh-water terns, aren't expected to be seen at Pulicat.

Grey Francolin

White-eyed Buzzard

Streaked Weaver

We also saw many of the regulars - Plain Prinia, Barn Swallows, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Indian Rollers, Paddyfield Pipits, Black-headed Munias, Grey Francolins, Green Bee-eaters, an Ashy Woodswallow, a distant White-eyed Buzzard, and the not-so-common Streaked Weaver and Pied Crested Cuckoo. Later on, we also saw a big flock of Spot-billed Pelicans and Greater Flamingos scattered around the lake.

By about 1:30PM, we headed back to the lodge, as it was again starting to get cloudy, and Umesh wanted to leave by around 4:00PM, as he was to drive back to Chennai; prior to that, we also had to discuss the day's list.

Bidding goodbye and a safe journey to Umesh, we too packed up to head back home. It was a little heart-breaking to leave the place that had given me such wonderful birding, but it was a great experience for a beginner like me, as I not only got to experience birding with senior birders, but also up saw huge numbers of very beautiful birds up close, something not many birders get to experience initially.

White-breasted Waterhen with young

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Report - BSAP AWC Participants Certificate Presentation function

Text: Humayun Taher; Photos: Amritha Lawrence

The annual Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Count (AWC) is a regular feature of the BSAP calendar and are well-attended by the members. AP (and now AP+Telangana) has been a regular contributor to this important international initiative since the inception of the program in 1987. This year (2015) also, the response from the members was very heartening and over 35 members participated in the counts throughout the two states.

To encourage and recognise the participants' efforts is something that has been on our minds for some time. To this end, this year we decided to ask the Wetlands International Secretariat if we could use their name and logo on a certificate to be presented to the participants. Wetlands International gave us a very positive response and encouraged us in this initiative. Accordingly, it was decided to have a small, informal function where we would invite the participants and present them with the certificates, to acknowledge their contributions towards the AWC activities.

Hence, on Saturday 11th April 2015, a small tea-time function was organized at the Vidyaranya School in Saifabad. The invitation list was restricted to the members of the BSAP who had participated in the Waterfowl Count activities and the BSAP Executive Committee. The program was kept "under wraps" as much as possible, so very few of the members had any idea of what was actually in the air!

Opening the function, BSAP President Aasheesh Pittie addressed the members about the importance of the Waterfowl Count activities, what the ramifications of this exercise are and how it is a key tool in understanding global populations of waterbirds and in gauging distribution patterns and population trends. He also stressed the importance of recording all our observations in the appropriate forums to ensure that these records are preserved for posterity and are readily available later on as required. His address was encouraging and very enthusiastically received. I think many of our members at that point wanted to ensure that the recording of the species is done with the minimum of delay!

Aasheeesh Pittie addressing the gathering

BSAP Hon. Secretary and AWC State Co-ordinator Shafaat Ulla spoke about the actual AWC activities and mentioned some of the highlights of this year's counts. He stressed the importance of revisiting even "disappointing" sites and added that it helps to plan sufficiently in advance, so as to ensure that maximum coverage is given to the established sites before moving on to additional sites. I think this is of supreme importance - although it is good to add on more sites and so increase the coverage of the counts, it is equally important to ensure that the earlier sites are regularly monitored. Additional sites are good, but not at the cost of passing over or being cursory with the existing sites. Another point mentioned by Shafaat Ulla was that even a "zero-count" is as important as a "high-count".

BSAP member Humayun then presented some actual facts and figures. The AWC counts this year encompassed a total of 62 sites (39 in 2014); these sites yielded a total of 3,63,279 individual birds counted, comprising 112 species. Humayun also read out some of the excellent and positive accolades and comments we have received from Wetlands International and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) on our efforts. This was received with great enthusiasm and applause from the members, and indeed it is something to be proud of! The fact that the AP+Telangana model is becoming a benchmark for AWC count data collation, is really a wonderful achievement for the BSAP and it is all thanks to the members who participated so enthusiastically in the count exercise.

A section of the audience

Following on from this, it was time for the actual business of the evening, which was the presentation of the AWC certificates to the participants. More than 50% of the members present were unaware of this new initiative, and were pleasantly surprised to be awarded these certificates. Aasheesh Pittie, Shafaat Ulla, M S Kulkarni, Nandu Kumar and Surekha Aitabathula presented the certificates to the participants who were present. (Here it may be pertinent to mention that the AWC count participants who could not attend the function are requested to contact Humayun to get their certificates.)

Members were also delighted to receive a personal note of congratulations from Wetlands International on these certificates, as it is an initiative that has often been mooted but never put into action. BSAP can justifiably claim another first here, as being the first organisation to actually present these participation certificates to the AWC participant members.

Tea and snacks, of course, are a foregone conclusion where BSAP activities are concerned and we indulged heartily in some tasty samosas, biscuits and that never-failing-cure-for-all-ills, hot, sweet *chai*.

The function ended with a vote of thanks proposed by Surekha Aitabathula.

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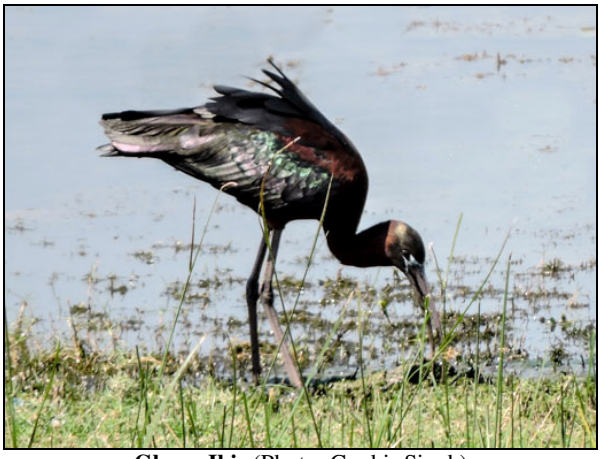
BIRDS AND NEWBIES

Trip Report – Pocharam, 15th March 2015

Humayun Taher



Glossy Ibis (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

There were quite a few of both, on this most excellent day! And I venture to suggest that all had a good time by the end of the day. Birds are always a joy to be around and, when you have several newcomers also turning out, joy becomes unconfined.

Shafaatsaab had some work on the day, so he had asked me to go ahead and lead. I hate leading the way - I invariably get lost when asked to lead the way - but excuses couldn't be made and so I reluctantly agreed. That being the case, it was a bit of a relief to find that the route to Pocharam is well-known and I wouldn't have to actually find my way to the site. Lawrence met me at Punjagutta and we waited for a few more people to join us. What we didn't bargain for was a busload of PhD students arriving and announcing that they were also accompanying the group. Well, everyone has as much of a right to enjoy a day out as us and I am not complaining. If we can encourage some of the students, it will be a definite step in the right direction.

A couple more cars now arrived and, having organized the people, we started off for the Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary where, according to Shafaatsaab, the staff had been informed of our arrival and were waiting to welcome us with open arms (and, no doubt, with open gates as well). We decided that we would not halt at Narsapur as we sometimes do, since Pocharam is a considerable distance and we wanted to reach there as early as possible.

That said, one stop that cannot, and should not, be avoided is the mandatory pit-stop for the *chai* that is an inseparable adjunct of birding. The *chai* shop at the gates of the Air Force Academy did us well in the matter of the steaming bohea, and coffee for the more purist of our members. Several other members had arrived at this rendezvous point, and the convoy of cars increased exponentially when we all finished our refreshments and started off again. Halting at Medak to stock up on edibles, we finally reached the Pocharam sanctuary at around 9 in the morning, which is quite late for birding.

Instead of entering the sanctuary, we decided to first head out to the lake, and investigate the sanctuary on our return. So said all of us and what a good decision it turned out to be! We trundled along the dirt road and finally pulled up at the little depression of rocks at the end that overlooks the waters.

Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Shouldering the usual accoutrements of birding, we stood there, taking in the sights. There was a considerable raft of duck on the waters; a very large raft was dimly visible in the distance, but quite a few of the birds were closer to the shores where we stood. We mounted the scopes onto the tripods and set off along the smooth edge of the lake, the short grass, well-cropped by geese and ducks resembling a well-manicured lawn, the swollen lake (really, this seems to be the only water-body around that actually has some water in it) and the dense scrub jungle stretching away on the eastern side which is the main Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary.

Garganey (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

It was a sight for sore eyes, all right! And the birds too… what can I say of the riot of colours and plumages that were discernible through the keen eyes of the two spotting scopes. Wigeons, resplendent in their red heads with fawn-coloured '*tilak*' marks on the forehead; Garganeys, diminutive-looking creatures with thick white eye-brows permanently raised, giving them a very supercilious expression; Spot-billed Ducks, neat and dainty with the dual-coloured beaks… but the best of the lot were the Black-tailed Godwits, some of them coming into their nuptial colours. These gorgeous birds, when fully dressed for breeding are magnificent creatures and we were very happy to see that several of the 300-odd birds we saw were in breeding regalia. Our lensmen were delighted with this display and captured some wonderful photographs of these magnificently-plumaged birds.

Black-tailed Godwit (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Lesser Whistling-duck (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The students arrived in their bus by this time and clustered around the scopes. Their keen eyes were able to discern a small pod of Greater Flamingos on the far bank. We peered through the scopes and twisted the magnification up to the maximum. Yes… sure enough, there they were… a group of some ten of the long-legged, long-necked birds sweeping the shallows for their preferred victuals. The water, though considerable, did not appear to be deep at the ends and where the flamingos were feeding, it was no more than about shin-deep. There were several hundred ducks scattered about on these shallows, but distance defeated a positive identification.

Cotton Pygmy-goose (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Brahminy Kite (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

A Brahminy Kite appeared overhead, gracefully skimming through the air, its bright yellow eyes scouring the waters for fish or frogs or maybe even an injured or young bird. On two small rocky islands in the bowels of the lake sat a vast flock of Great Cormorants, looking for all the world like a gaggle of nuns, awaiting the arrival of the new Pope! The heat from the sun bouncing off the waters was making the cormorants flutter their necks frantically and I wondered, as I mopped my own face with an already-sodden handkerchief, why they didn't take to the waters to cool themselves down.

Small Pratincole (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

The newer members were now observed bombarding the "oldies" with questions and comments. Books came into action and some pertinent and interesting questions were being asked and responded to. I took this opportunity to give some of the newcomers a spot-lesson on bird identification which, I am pleased to report, was well-received and, in fact, immediately implemented - one of our new members proudly announced that she had managed to identify a Garganey; an excellent start to birding!

Wire-tailed Swallow (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

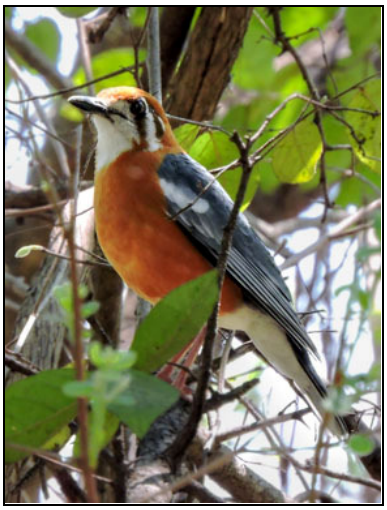
While talking we observed three people suddenly appear from the wildlife sanctuary and out onto the shores of the lake. Separated as we were by the sheet of water, we were not sure whether these were BSAP members or not, but a glance through the scopes and binoculars revealed that they were all long-standing members of the society. Nandu, Hargopal and Ramakrishna *garus* had duped us all… they had reached this place the previous evening! Speaking to them on the mobile, we decided to meet up for victuals at the Forest Department office at the entrance of the sanctuary.

In the meantime, the students decided that they had seen most of what they wanted to see and, with many thanks and assurances of returning, they departed in their charabanc. The rest of us, having also seen most of what was to be seen on the waters, now turned our attention to the larks and pipits running about on the shores. There were several interesting species to be seen, such as the Sykes's Lark and the Paddyfield Pipit.

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

I looked in vain for the Grey-necked Bunting that is quite regularly seen on the shores of Pocharam, but there were none this time. Nor did we see the Sandgrouse that, again, are regulars at this spot. Maybe it was a trifle late in the day now for these birds; a fact that was borne out by the strength of the sun on our backs.

It was time to return, so we packed up our optics and headed back to the Forest Department office, where there are good shady trees under which we could sit and partake of our breakfast. While fuelling ourselves, a Paradise Flycatcher appeared on the tree above our heads, much to our delight. It sat there, peering down in puzzlement at the motley collection.



Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

An Orange-headed Thrush was also sighted just outside the fence, which had all the photographers clustering around and almost treading on each other's toes in their eagerness to get that perfect shot. Meantime we wrote up the list for the day, and were pleased to note that the total stood at the considerable figure of 89 species. What more could one ask or expect from our most excellent and benevolent St. Patrick!!

The full list of species seen is given below:

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
1	R	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	
2	R	Large Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	
3	R	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	NT
4	R	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	
5	R	Great Egret	*Egretta alba*	
6	R	Intermediate Egret	*Egretta intermedia*	
7	R	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	
8	R	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	
9	R	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus coromandus*	
10	R	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	
11	R	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	NT
12	R	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	
13	R	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	NT
14	R	Indian Black Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	
15	V	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*	
16	R	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	
17	R	Comb Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*	
18	R	Cotton Pygmy-goose	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	
19	M	Eurasian Wigeon	*Anas penelope*	
20	R	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	
21	M	Garganey	*Anas querquedula*	
22	R	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	
23	R	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	
24	R	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*	
25	R	Short-toed Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*	
26	R	Indian Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	
27	R	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	
28	R	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	
29	R	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	
30	R	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	
31	M	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	
32	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	
33	M	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	NT
34	M	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	
35	M	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	
36	M	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	
37	R	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	
38	R	Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*	
39	R	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	
40	R	Black-bellied Tern	*Sterna acuticauda*	NT
41	M	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
42	R	Rock Dove	*Columba livia intermedia*	
43	R	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	
44	R	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	
45	R	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	
46	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	
47	R	Southern Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	
48	R	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	
49	R	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopacea*	
50	R	Asian Palm-swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	
51	R	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	
52	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	
53	R	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	
54	R	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	
55	R	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	
56	R	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Tockus birostris*	
57	R	Coppersmith Barbet	*Megalaima haemacephala*	
58	R	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*	
59	R	Sykes's Lark	*Galerida deva*	
60	M	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	
61	R	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*	
62	R	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*	
63	R	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*	
64	R	Large Cuckoo-shrike	*Coracina macei*	
65	R	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	
66	R	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*	
67	R	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	
68	R	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*	
69	R	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	
70	R	Orange-headed Thrush	*Zoothera citrina*	
71	R	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*	
72	M	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*	
73	R	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	
74	R	Indian Black Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus*	
75	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*	
76	R	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	
77	R	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	
78	M	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	
79	R	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*	
80	R	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*	
81	R	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*	
82	R	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
83	R	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*	
84	M	Rosy Starling	*Sturnus roseus*	
85	R	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	
86	R	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	
87	R	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	
88	R	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	
89	R	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	

Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

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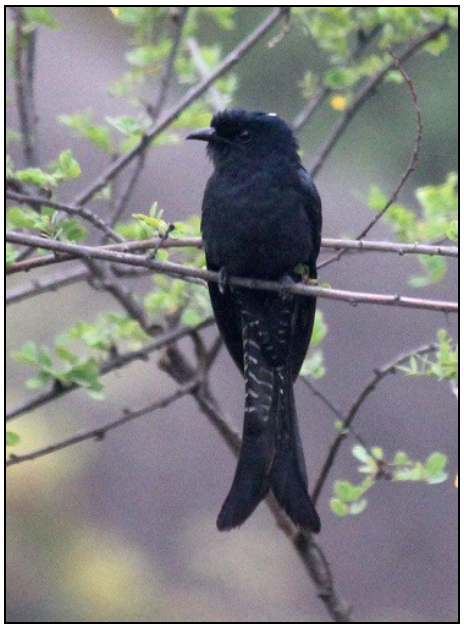
Sighting of Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo at Hyderabad

Anand Kalinadhabhatla, Eva Veroeveren and Sheetal Vyas report the sighting of a Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo at University of Hyderabad campus on the 6th of July, 2014.



Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo
(Photo: Eva Veroeveren)

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The art of birding along roads

Anjali Pande

As we usually see them, roads are means to an end. They let us find our destinations. We hardly ever think about roads as birding areas or as destinations for bird watching. Over the years, however, I have seen that roads hold many a secret birding delight, which we miss when we only speed along them. The commonest acknowledgement of this importance of roads on birding trips comes in the form of our additions to birding lists under the sub-title "birds seen en route" and as we habitually start looking out for birds perched on electric lines along the roads.

A fruitful birding experience is provided by roads which run along the borders of wooded areas, or which mark a division between protected areas and villages. Walking down these roads, one can hope to run into interesting mixed hunting parties, which remain longer in the open compared to sightings in wooded areas. Just by being on the right side of such a road at the right time, one can get to watch even small and shy or normally elusive birds without much difficulty.

This works especially well when the road also demarcates altitudes. Mornings on such roads yield sightings of birds as they leave thickly-wooded areas to forage in the surrounding fields or along water streams etc. Around noon, these roads are the places where one can hope to see raptors heading out to look for prey in open countryside. And as evening falls, these roads can provide unexpected encounters with Nightjars or even with four-legged dwellers of woods.

Unarguably the best form of birding while walking down a road can be experienced on tiny, winding village paths. Walking down leisurely along such paths guarantees hours of joy and, invariably, a very satisfying mix of bird habitat. We can have our own favourite corner on such small paths, to mark those surprise sightings of rarities. On a tiny path somewhere around Ooty, I was once pleasantly surprised by the laughter of some Nilgiri Laughing Thrushes foraging under some bushes.

On days when the heat is too strong or activity is low, a walk along village paths can be a very good alternative to birding in woods. However, sometimes walking around on deserted village paths can put you in an unexpected tough spot, as we once experienced when a village dog decided to follow and finally bite one of us. We ended up looking for the village Health Centre instead of getting back to catch the return bus!

As one goes along village paths looking for birds, sometimes friendly villagers volunteer useful information leading to very good sightings of nests or roosting areas. Just as useful as the tiny village paths are busy roads crossing through peripheries of protected forest areas. Although one does need to be extremely cautious while walking along such roads that have heavy traffic on them, these state highways can be walked along stretches where they skirt forests. In spite of disturbances like loud honking of trucks or having to constantly keep an eye on traffic, one can have good sightings as such roads are lined with tall trees which are preferred perches for some birds.

The most interesting, of course, are roads that are, on their own, pleasant birding destinations for an easy day's birding. If you are lucky enough to live in areas that have hills or forests easily accessible, one strategy is to get on a bus, get down at some place on this road and walk either onwards or back to point A - for example, take a bus to Mukkali, get down somewhere en route and walk down to the entrance to Silent Valley, to be greeted by the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithacus*) and those roosting Ashy Woodswallows (*Artamus fuscus*) every time. In Shillong, the Old Guwahati Road is one such good birding destination; closer home many of us have birded along roads to Ananthagiri or Narsapur.

A word of caution though, while birding along roads look out for vehicles, especially while crossing the road. While watching or tracking a bird, we tend to get 'lost' and not pay attention to where we are walking - we need to just be careful because, after all, roads are built for traffic first.

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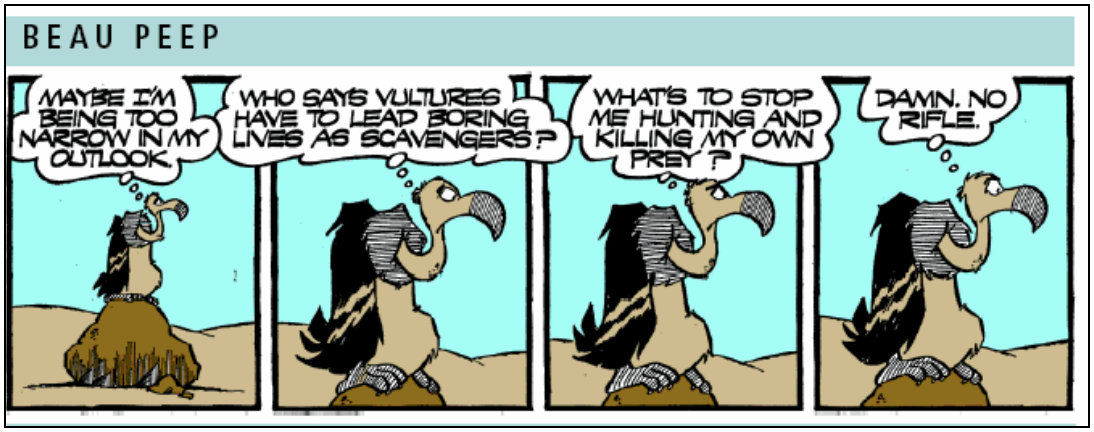
Bird Humour


BEAU PEEP
MAYBE I'M BEING TOO NARROW IN MY OUTLOOK.
WHO SAYS VULTURES HAVE TO LEAD BORING LIVES AS SCAVENGERS?
WHAT'S TO STOP ME HUNTING AND KILLING MY OWN PREY?
DAMN. NO RIFLE.

(From Times of India, 01-04-2014)

Sighting of Striated Heron at Hyderabad

Text and photo: Sudhir Moorti

Striated Heron

On the 4th of April, 2015, Anita & I as usual decided to head to Himayat Sagar Lake for a spot of birding in an attempt to escape from the corporate grind. Starting off post-lunch, we reached the spot around 3:00PM. As we were approaching the shore, negotiating the bumpy dirt-track, we were greeted by a lethargic cormorant sitting fairly close by and sunning itself. After watching and catching the little guy on camera, we moved on.

We parked the car and decided to walk along the shore to our left. We reached a small island (If you can call it that) covered with some three to four hundred raucously loud River Terns. We sat for a while on the bank and enjoyed their naughty antics.

As we followed a narrow trail, we met some of our passerine friends - Paddyfield Warblers, Red-vented Bulbuls, Common Ioras and Indian Robins to name a few. In the water were some Garganeys, swimming around lazily, while a Common Kingfisher sat on a reed and some Painted Storks circled above.

Having hit the end of the trail we turned back. Light had started fading, so we thought of calling it a day. We were delighted to spot a Greater Painted-snipe sitting at the edge of water. Though we couldn't get any good pictures, we were content to have seen it.

As I was walking ahead, suddenly there was some rustling and a bird flew from nearby, across a strip of water and landed on the other bank. I shot off a couple of snaps in flight and realised that it was not a Pond Heron. We ran, trying to get as close possible to the bird, and got a couple of more pictures of it sitting on the bank before it skedaddled into a cluster of reeds.

Closer examination revealed that it was indeed the Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*). The bird being crepuscular in Nature had wandered out of thick reeds since it was dusk. We high-fived and congratulated ourselves on such good luck. Our day was certainly made!!!

We were told there were very few records from this region but that it is probably because of its crepuscular habits that it is seldom sighted.

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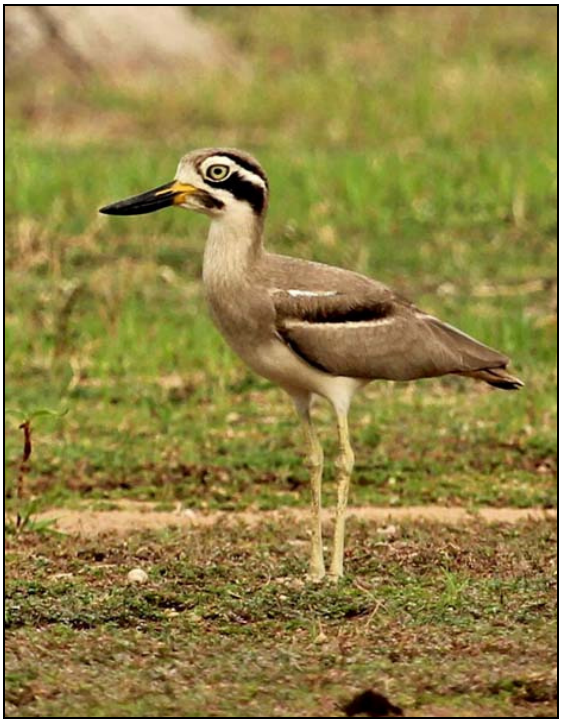
Sighting of Great Thick-knee at Hyderabad

Text and photo: Sudhir Moorti

Anita and I, being the Obsessive Compulsive Birders (like the disorder) that we are, keep sneaking off to nearby birding areas (important or not) even on weekdays. These pockets of relief from our demanding corporate lives are huge stress-busters. So on 9th March, 2015 we drove away towards Ameenpur. We rushed to the lake directly from office (in proper formal attire) in search of the elusive Dunlin after hearing of some sightings at this spot. I tried to take a shortcut and promptly lost my way; as usual Google Maps led me astray. Finally we reached the lake, parked the car and set off in search of the evading wader.

As we walked along the shore, we found ourselves staring intensely at all each and every shorebirds, but only the usual Sandpipers, Stints and Plovers were hanging around. Hardly a few minutes into our quest, we were trudging along when a bird suddenly took off from close by, which at first glance appeared to be a Thick-knee. But we had a sneaking suspicion as it looked much larger, hence we decided to investigate, abandoning our efforts to spot the Dunlin - luckily for us! About a hundred meters further down the shore, we saw the fellow standing on the green grass. On getting closer, we realised that it was actually a Great Thick-knee *(Esacus recurvirostris)* - the striking black-and-white pattern on the face and the slightly recurved bill was enough confirmation for us. Our joy knew no bounds, but we stifled our excitement and followed the bird, which had flown further ahead. We tiptoed as close as possible and gazed to our heart's content; I also got a few shots, until the bird ended the show by simply flying across the lake towards the far shore.

We let out a few whoops and carried on birding for an hour or so more. Many of my non-birder friends often ask me what I get out of it (birding), some of them even think I am completely Cuckoo (pun intended)! I guess it's those few seconds of glee upon sighting a beautiful bird, which is the only real reward for our efforts.



Great Thick-knee

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Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*)

Purple Sunbird
(Ankola, Karnataka, 15-01-2012)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Nectariniidae
Genus: *Cinnyris*
Species: *C. asiaticus*
Size: 10 cm

Description &distribution: The Purple Sunbird is a small sunbird with distinct sexual dimorphism. It has a relatively short down-curved bill, with brush-tipped tubular tongues that help in sucking out flower nectar, their main food. The male Purple Sunbird is a dark, glossy, metallic purple on its upperparts, with wings that appear dark brown; the underparts are also the same blackish-purple in the breeding season. The iridescent purple colour becomes visible when the light strikes it at the right angle. In the non-breeding (or 'eclipse') males, though, the underparts are yellow with a central streak of black. In breeding plumage, the male bird also has a bright-blue shoulder patch, yellow pectoral tufts, and a maroon tinge to the collar feathers. Female birds are olive-green above and yellowish below, with the yellow throat and breast becoming paler towards the vent. They have a dark eye-stripe and a pale supercilium extending behind the eye. White-tipped outer tail feathers are seen in both sexes.

The Purple Sunbird has a wide distribution, from West Asia across the Indian sub-continent to South-east Asia. The nominate race is found mainly in India, east of the desert regions of Rajasthan and south of the Himalayas, all through west and south India into Sri Lanka. The region from northern Andhra Pradesh, northwards through Orissa to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indochina see the sub-species *C. a. intermedius*, whereas *C. a. brevirostris* is seen from the desert regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat, westwards across Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Arabian peninsula. This sub-species has been known to winter south near Goa, and has a greenish tinge to the yellow pectoral tufts.

Behaviour: The Purple Sunbird is resident in most parts of its range, though with some local movements noted in the drier parts of Pakistan and north-western India. It is usually found in pairs or, sometimes, in small groups. It prefers thin forest patches and gardens, including urban spaces, which have suitable flowers from where it can source nectar, its primary diet; it does also take fruit, berries and small insects occasionally, though. It prefers to perch rather than hover while taking nectar, and has a tendency to flick its wings while feeding. While it usually uses its tubular tongue to suck out nectar, it is also known to slit flowers at the base for this purpose.

The Purple Sunbird is very vocal, and has a piercing *'chwit'* or *'chwing'* call. It may join other individuals to mob owls or other predators. The courtship display involves the male raising its head, fanning the tail, fluttering the partly-open wings to expose the yellow pectoral tufts, and singing.

Nesting: The Purple Sunbird breeds mainly before the monsoons, from April to June in India, and from January to June in Sri Lanka. The nest, built almost completely by the female, is a pouch of strips of vegetation, lichen and bark, which are not woven but are held together by cobwebs. It has an entrance hole on the side, which is usually shielded by an overhanging projection. The nest is usually suspended from low branches of thorny plants, but are quite often seen near human habitation, hanging from man-made structures like wires, light-bulbs, etc. The typical clutch consists of 2 eggs. Both parents participate in feeding duties, though the female may take on more trips as the chicks grow older.

Local name: The Purple Sunbird is known as *'shakar khora'* or *'phool sungni'* in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, '*thena pitta'* or *'ooda thena pitta'* in Telugu, and *'then-kudi'* or *'poo-kudichan'* in Tamil.

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Reed-beds of the University of Hyderabad

Text and photos: Joby Joseph

There are two prominent water bodies and numerous waterlogged areas in the University of Hyderabad (UoH) campus. A large part of the area along the banks of these water bodies are reed-beds. They have been a source of a lot of birding joy for me over the past four years. Unlike the other types of vegetation that I bird in, these reed-beds are a challenge, but the rewards are proportionately exciting. As these are a stroll away from my work place, I tend to frequent them.

A variety of birds - crakes, reed warblers, prinias, weaver birds, bitterns and waders - inhabit reed-beds. However, the birds that occupy reed-beds are most secretive as compared to those that inhabit the other vegetation around us. They are very shy and rarely come out of the thick reeds. If they do, they dart back immediately at the slightest sign of human presence. Patience and stillness are the key requirements.

I find it quite helpful to stand close to the reeds where you have a view of considerable stretch of the boundary of the reed-bed and a plain patch of land. This helps in seeing those that dart out of the reeds to the shore briefly, and at the same time enable one to peer into the reed-bed next to you.

Some birds found in the reed-beds in UoH: *(A) Baillon's Crake (B) Ruddy-breasted Crake (C) Paddyfield Warbler (D) Greater Painted-snipe (E) Siberian Rubythroat (F) White-breasted Waterhen*

Pictures of a few of the birds that I have sighted over the years are shown above. Some of them like the Siberian Rubythroat (*Luscinia calliope*) and Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*) are migrants and have been sighted in multiple seasons among these reeds. Some others like Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*) are residents but seldom sighted. Others like White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*), Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) and Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) are seen more often.

When I look at the distribution maps for some of these species, I find some are hardly recorded from around Hyderabad. I think these species are more widespread than what is represented by the maps in field guides. It is possible that they are difficult to be sighted in places where they inhabit thick reeds and, hence, go unreported. An intensive survey of the reed-beds in and around our places of residence or work may be a good idea to test if this is the case. Arm yourselves with patience and stillness to enjoy the surprises!

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For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*